IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A computer-based method for use in accordance with an automatic mail sorting machine, the method comprising the steps of:

scanning a piece of post mail in accordance with an address block locating (ABL) system for locating one or more address blocks on the piece of post mail;

analyzing the one or more located address blocks in accordance with an optical character recognition (OCR) system;

determining at least one confidence value, for each of the one or more located address blocks, associated with at least one of: (i) address block format characteristics; (ii) data retrievable by a sort plan associated with a site of the automatic mail sorting machine; and (iii) postmark information retrievable from a postmark; and

providing a coupling between the ABL system and the OCR system capable of feeding one or more results associated with the ABL system as an input to the OCR system and one or more results associated with the OCR system as an input to the ABL system.

2. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the coupling is provided such that the ABL system scans for a further address block when no ZIP code could be extracted by the OCR system from the current address block currently being analyzed.

3. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein a type of information that is evaluated in deciding whether the ABL system scans for a further address block is at least one of: (i) confidence of the OCR result relating to the current address block just analyzed; (ii) address block content information; (iii) confidence of the ABL result relating to the current address block just localized; (iv) data retrievable by a sort plan associated with a site of the automated sorting machine; (v) postmark information retrievable from a postmark; and (vi) knowledge-based information derivable from at least one of the types of information in (i) through (v).

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of providing a coupling between the ABL system and the OCR system in which the ABL system continues to scan for further potential address blocks after having found at least one potential address block while the at least one potential address block is being processed by the OCR system.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of providing a ranking for each of the address blocks, being at least one of located and analyzed, for finding the most probable destination address block.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5, wherein a type of information that the ranking is based on is at least one of: (i) confidence of the OCR result relating to each of the address blocks; (ii) address block content information; (iii) confidence of the ABL result relating to the current address block just localized; (iv) data retrievable by a sort plan associated with a site of the automated sorting machine; (v) postmark information retrievable from a postmark; and (vi) knowledge-based information derivable from at least one of the types of information in (i) through (v).

7. (Original) The method of claim 4, wherein one or more operations associated with the ABL system and the OCR system are performed at least partly concurrently.

8. (Currently amended) Apparatus for use in accordance with an automatic mail sorting machine, the apparatus comprising:

at least one processor operative to: (i) scan a piece of post mail in accordance with an address block locating (ABL) system for locating one or more address blocks on the piece of post mail; (ii) analyze the one or more located address blocks in accordance with an optical character recognition (OCR) system; <u>(iii) determine at least one confidence value, for each of the one or more located address blocks, associated with at least one of: (a) address block format characteristics; (b) data retrievable by a sort plan associated with a site of the automatic mail sorting machine; and (c) postmark information retrievable from a postmark;</u> and (iii) provide a coupling between the ABL

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system and the OCR system capable of feeding one or more results associated with the ABL system as an input to the OCR system and one or more results associated with the OCR system as an input to the ABL system.

9. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the coupling is provided such that the ABL system scans for a further address block when no ZIP code could be extracted by the OCR system from the current address block currently being analyzed.

10. (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 8, wherein a type of information that is evaluated in deciding whether the ABL system scans for a further address block is at least one of: (i) confidence of the OCR result relating to the current address block just analyzed; (ii) address block content information; (iii) confidence of the ABL result relating to the current address block just localized; (iv) data retrievable by a sort plan associated with a site of the automated sorting machine; (v) postmark information retrievable from a postmark; and (vi) knowledge-based information derivable from at least one of the types of information in (i) through (v).

11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the at least one processor is further operative to provide a coupling between the ABL system and the OCR system in which the ABL system continues to scan for further potential address blocks after having found at least one potential address block while the at least one potential address block is being processed by the OCR system.

12. (Original) The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the at least one processor is further operative to provide a ranking for each of the address blocks, being at least one of located and analyzed, for finding the most probable destination address block.

13. (Original) The apparatus of claim 12, wherein a type of information that the ranking is based on is at least one of: (i) confidence of the OCR result relating to each of the address blocks; (ii) address block content information; (iii) confidence of the ABL result relating to the current

address block just localized; (iv) data retrievable by a sort plan associated with a site of the automated sorting machine; (v) postmark information retrievable from a postmark; and (vi) knowledge-based information derivable from at least one of the types of information in (i) through (v).

14. (Original) The apparatus of claim 8, wherein one or more operations associated with the ABL system and the OCR system are performed at least partly concurrently.

15. (Currently amended) An article of manufacture for use in accordance with an automatic mail sorting machine, comprising a machine readable medium containing one or more programs which when executed implement the steps of:

scanning a piece of post mail in accordance with an address block locating (ABL) system for locating one or more address blocks on the piece of post mail;

analyzing the one or more located address blocks in accordance with an optical character recognition (OCR) system;

<u>determining at least one confidence value, for each of the one or more located address blocks, associated with at least one of: (i) address block format characteristics; (ii) data retrievable by a sort plan associated with a site of the automatic mail sorting machine; and (iii) postmark information retrievable from a postmark;</u> and

providing a coupling between the ABL system and the OCR system capable of feeding one or more results associated with the ABL system as an input to the OCR system and one or more results associated with the OCR system as an input to the ABL system.